

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 02141 030632Z

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

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INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMCONSUL LAHORE

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 2141

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PK, PINT

SUBJECT: ELECTION DAY AND AFTERWARD -- TIMETABLE

1. AS THE CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO A CLOSE, ATTENTION IS BEGINNING TO FOCUS ON THE MACHINERY AND ADMINISTRATIVE/CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES THAT WILL BE USED TO DETERMINE THE ELECTION RESULTS AND TO CHOOSE A PRIME MINISTER. THIS CONCERN CENTERS ON TWO MAIN POINTS: ABILITY OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION TO PROVIDE THE NATION WITH FAIR, FREE, AND IMPARTIAL VOTING; AND THE ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS OF POLITICIANS AND STATE APPARATUS TO SMOOTHLY FOLLOW THE NEVER-BEFORE-USED TIMETABLE FOR EITHER A TRANSITION TO A NEW GOVERNMENT OR A NEW EDITION OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

2. ELECTION COMMISSION: DURING THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD THE ELECTION COMMISSION MADE WIDELY RESPECTED, APPARENTLY IMPARTIAL DECISIONS OF DISPUTES; HAS ENGAGED IN A PROGRAM OF EDUCATION VOTERS ABOUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS; AND HAS DONE A QUIET BUT REPORTEDLY COMMENDABLE JOB IN A SHORT TIME OF TRAINING THE NEARLY 14,000 PRESIDING OFFICERS WHO WILL BE IN CHARGE OF THE POLLING NETWORKS ON ELECTION DAY. THE COMMISSION HAS ALSO ISSUED

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 02141 030632Z

NUMEROUS INSTRUCTIONS ESTABLISHING A COMPLICATED PROCESS FOR TABULATING VOTES IN EACH POLLING PLACE, HAVING THE RESULTS WITNESSED BY POLL WATCHERS FROM EACH PARTY , AND ENSURING THE SECURITY OF THE BALLOTS AND RESULTS WHEN THEY ARE SENT TO DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS. HOWEVER, IT IS THE PRESIDING AND RETURNING OFFICERS WHO WILL BE THE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE ELECTION OFFICERS FOR THE INTEGRITY OF VOTING ON ELECTION DAY. THE SACTITY OF THE

BALLOT WILL BE DIRECTLY DEPENDENT ON HOW THEY ACT AND WHETHER THE OTHER CIVIL AND POLICE AUTHORITIES DO NOT INTERFERE IN THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES.

3. DISSEMINATION OF ELECTION RESULTS: THOUGH THE CANDIDATES AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE AT THE POLLING STATIONS TO WITNESS COUNTING OF BALLOTS, OFFICIAL RETURNS WILL BE UNDER THE STRICT CONTROL OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION. THE COMMISSION HAS ANNOUNCED THAT OFFICIAL, CERTIFIED RESULTS WILL BE ANNOUNCED ON MARCH 9 FOR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONTESTS AND ON MARCH 12 FOR PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY SEATS. HOWEVER, BECAUSE THE RESULTS WILL BE KNOWN AT THE PRECINCT LEVEL ON ELECTION NIGHT AND BECAUSE PAKISTAN TELEVISION IS COMMITTED TO PRESENTING 36 CONTINUOUS HOURS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTION RESULTS COVERAGE, THE ELECTORATE SHOULD HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF THE RESULTS WELL BEFORE THE ELECTION COMMISSION PUBLICIZES THE OFFICIAL TABULATION. (IT SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT BECAUSE THE TV COVERAGE WILL DEPEND ENTIRELY ON THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED APP WIRE SERVICE'S FEEDING INFORMATION TO PAK TV, THE GOP WILL BE ABLE TO EXERCISE CONSIDERABLE CONTROL OVER THE INFORMATION DISSEMINATED THROUGH TELEVISION COVERAGE.)

4. TIMETABLE FOR OFFICE-TAKING: ONCE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE, THE CONSTITUTION REQUIRES (ARTICLE 91) THE NEW ASSEMBLY TO CONVENE ON THE THIRTIETH DAY FOLLOWING THE ELECTION (IN THIS CASE, APRIL 6), UNLESS SOONER SUMMONED BY THE PRESIDENT. RUMORS LAST JANUARY THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD CONVENE THE NEW ASSEMBLY ON MARCH 23 (PAKISTAN DAY) ARE UNCONFIRMED.

WHEN THE NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONVENES AND THE MEMBERS ARE SWORN IN THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS IS TO ELECT A NEW SPEAKER
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 02141 030632Z

AND DEPUTY SPEAKER. (THE FORMER SPEAKER REMAINS IN OFFICE UNTIL A SUCCESSOR IS ELECTED.) THE NEXT REQUIRED ORDER OF BUSINESS IS TO CHOOSE A PRIME MINISTER TO BE ELECTED BY THE VOTES OF THE MAJORITY OF THE TOTAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP. (UNLIKE OTHER WESTMINSTER TYPE CONSTITUTIONS, THE PAK CONSTITUTION PROVIDES NO ROLE FOR THE PRESIDENT IN THE SELECTION OF THE PM.) UNTIL A NEW PRIME MINISTER IS ELECTED, THE PREVIOUSLY CHOSEN PRIME MINISTER REMAINS IN OFFICE AND IS THE ONLY PERSON AUTHORIZED TO GIVE THE ADVICE ON WHICH THE PRESIDENT ACTS. DURING THIS PERIOD THE PREVIOUSLY CHOSEN PRIME MINISTER RETAINS THE COMPLETE AUTHORITY OF OFFICE AND POWER OVER THE MACHINERY AND RESOURCES OF THE GOVERNMENT. SHOULD THE ELECTION RETURNS PROVE CLOSE, THIS WOULD OF COURSE BE A GREAT ADVANTAGE TO BHUTTO, PARTICULARLY IN A POLITICAL CULTURE IN WHICH PARTY LOYALTY IS OFTEN QUESTIONABLE.
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